



Good People Behave, Bad People Design. Misbehaving as a Methodological Framework for Design and Design Education

Tiphaine Kazi-Tani, Emeline Brulé, Frédéric Valentin, Cédric Mivielle, Justé Peciulyté

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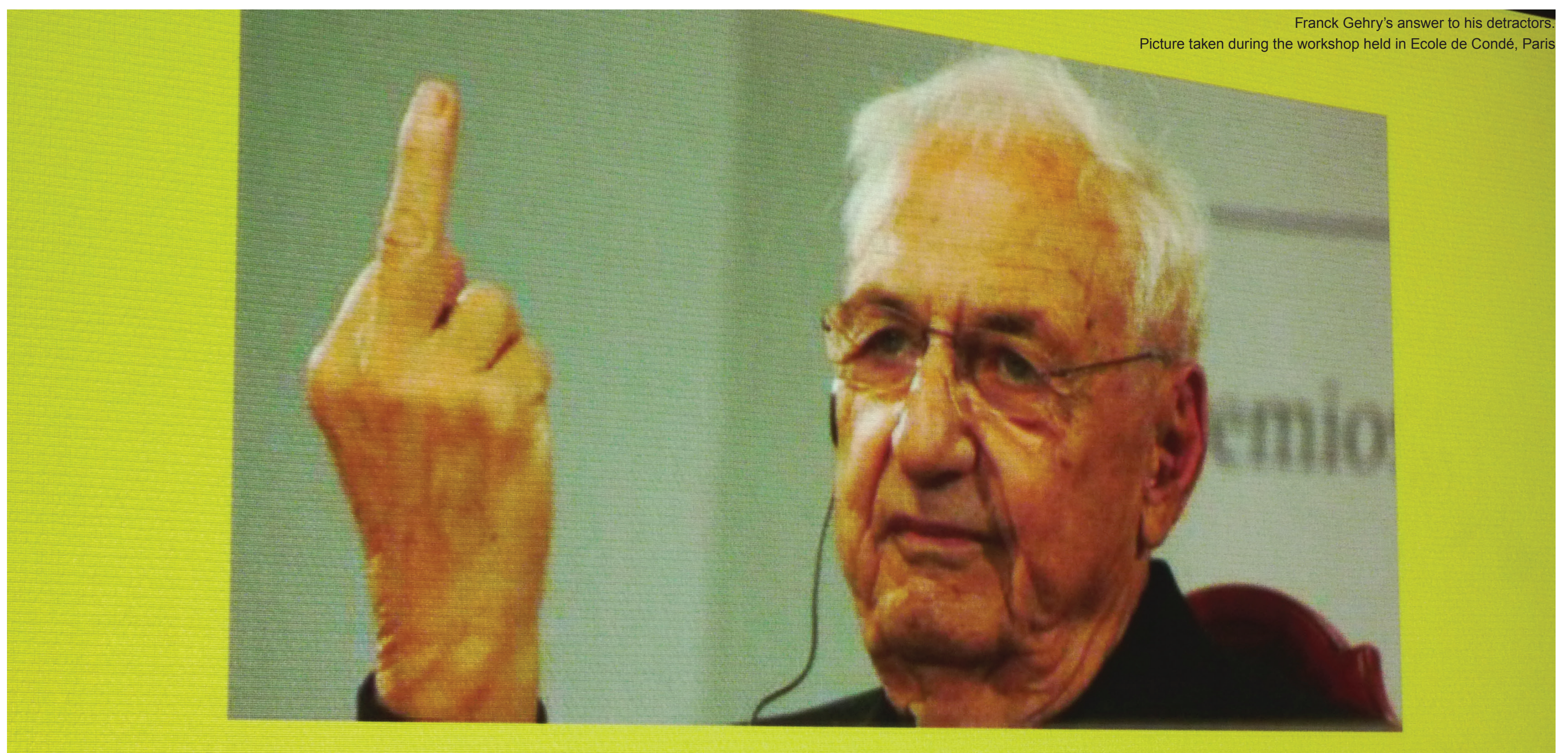
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Franck Gehry's answer to his detractors.
Picture taken during the workshop held in Ecole de Condé, Paris

Good people behave. Bad people design. Misbehaving as a framework for design and design education.

Tiphaine Kazi-Tani, Telecom ParisTech, tiphaine.kazitani@telecom-paristech.fr

Émeline Brulé, Telecom ParisTech, emeline.brule@telecom-paristech.fr

Frédéric Valentin, Telecom ParisTech, frederic.valentin@telecom-paristech.fr

Juste Peculyte, Vilnius Academy of Arts, juste.peculyte@gmail.com

Cédric Mivielle, Telecom ParisTech, cedric.mivielle@telecom-paristech.fr

Abstract: What happens when unwanted or unexpected attitudes infiltrate design processes, artifacts and uses? This paper focuses on misbehaving as part of the paradigm of design research that explores new ways to think our objects, spaces and interactions. We built upon a mosaic of case-studies and conceptual inputs to identify how “misbehaving attitudes” may operate within contexts informed by habitus, norms, regulations, standards, protocols, procedures, and/or laws. The hypothesis of this in-progress research is that these attitudes should be considered as potential methodological approaches that can enrich and extend the most “classical” practices of design. To put it forthright: can “misbehaving” approaches in design enhance the practices of design? To conclude, this paper will discuss how “misbehaving” in design education could foster the “critical thinking” advocated in numerous curriculums (Combs, Cennamo & Newbill, 2009; Finn, Baum & Newbill, 2011; Ministère de l’Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, 2012; etc.).

Design Activism, Design Values, Design Knowledge, Teaching & Learning Approaches



The building of a DIY Spot in St Quentin-en-Yvelines

The mischievous ways of design

What happens when attitudes usually identified as marginal, extreme, unwanted or unexpected infiltrate design processes, artifacts and uses? What about the designerly ways of mischief? And the mischievous ways of design? We propose “misbehaving design” as a specific development of design exploration (Fallman, 2008). Design exploration “often seeks to test ideas and to ask ‘What if?’—but also to provoke, criticize, and experiment to reveal alternatives to the expected and traditional, to transcend accepted paradigms, to bring matters to a head, and to be proactive and societal in its expression.”. This kind of practice of exploration allows to better understand the issues of designed objects but also enrich a more “classical” practice of design. Through a mosaic of case studies, we are identifying common properties underlying heterogeneous design situations, as they challenge seemingly rigid context, informed by habitus, norms, regulations, standards, protocols, procedures, and/or laws. We’re proposing that these properties might be understood as the specific properties of some “trouble-making” kind of exploration design that we’ve chosen to name “misbehaving design”.

While reviewing design literature on the purposes and aims of design, one can highlight how design can be involved within hegemonic apparatuses of biopolitical organization and administration (Woodhouse & Patton, 2004; Agamben, 2009; Keshavarz & Mazé, 2013; Brulé & Kazi-Tani, 2015).

Thus it produces discourses and frameworks first assuming, then regulating, what we may call orthodox design practices: “orthodoxy” is built from the ecclesiastical latin orthodoxus (“who has the true faith”) created after the greek *ὀρθός* / *ὁρθός*, literally “correct, right, fair opinion”, while “deviance”, from the late latin *deviare*, should be understood as “leaving the right path”, “not following its normal course”.

Hegemonic attitudes in design research and practice - self-identified as orthodox if not refuting any sort of “designerly deviance” - are not only widely documented with the history of the discipline but have also nurtured mainstream industrial design (Loos, (1998 [1910]); Loewy, 1979 ; Rams, 1984; Findeli, 1994 ; Brulé & Kazi-Tani, 2015).

On the contrary, if “misbehaviors” might seem to be the “odd numbers” of design, they also seem to address certain of its boundaries, to open a breach in such normative/regulative frameworks: a space for debate, empowerment, and rearrangement. If clearly identified, qualified, and conceptualized, they might impact and nurture design methods. In order to examine our intuitions, we have been firstly seeking after attitudes, in different design contexts and at different stages of a design project, which empirically appear in a tension with the regulating / normalizing frames within design and design practice.

Secondly the hypothesis of this in-progress research is that these attitudes should not be considered as marginal ways in design practices, but rather as potential methodological approaches that can enrich and extend the most classical / industrial practices of design. We are exploring ways that these attitudes or approaches are currently rearranging design :

- Processes: questioning conducts and conditions within conceptive processes
- Artifacts: disobedience and dysfunction: neurotological artifacts
- Uses & users: ab-using, mis-using: the profanatory user (Agamben 2007; 2009)

From a misbehaving attitude to a misbehaving approach? We propose “misbehaving” as a certain way of interplaying, resetting and reconfiguring a given arrangement. Let’s consider interplay (“the way in which two or more things have an effect on each other”) as the qualities of relationships between agents (spaces,

artifacts, “scripted objects”, materials, tools, users, etc.). These relationships can be spatial, temporal, social, discursive, political, processual, etc. These interplaying agents are forming what we identify as an arrangement (translated from the french “agencement”: Deleuze & Guattari, 1985). Designers, artifacts, users, have the ability to re-play, foil, overplay, de-script (Akrich, 1992) this arrangement to break, expand, create rules, scripts, situations, norms, meanings, etc.

We built upon various case studies and theoretical/ conceptual inputs to identify how “misbehaving attitudes” may operate within a seemingly rigid context, informed by habitus, norms, regulations, standards, protocols, procedures, and/or laws. Throughout seemingly unrelated field of conception and application, we observe how “misbehaving design” tricks and disputes normative and regulative frames, and unveils their fundamental property as an arrangement: their ability to be rearranged, by resetting distances and reshaping spacings, and to redefine the relationships and the dynamics of interplay. Each case-study actually highlights “misbehaving” properties operating at each level of a design proposition and observes not only the way they interplay with their given arrangement, but also propose or impose a rearrangement.

Case study one : Reconditioning as an Approach

In this case study, we take interest in the ways digital design tools are conditioning the design processes and can be conditioned in return. The predominant uses of digital tools in current design practices ask us to reconsider the question of the relation between the practitioner and the means of conception. We argue that there are distinct ways to consider and to lay the techniques out, which leads to the singular ways to conduct that allow the designer to modulate its own action scheme (Ilies & Meijers, 2014) in order to expand the range of its possibilities and the reach of her intentions in the creative process. However, this demands a particular approach from the designer towards the technical means, an approach that constitutes a necessary disruption regarding to usual ways of putting these tools into practice and therefore a misbehavior.

Case study two: Perspectives on (Dis)Obedience in Domotics

In this case study, we will look into two examples of “smart home” systems. We will first identify the rhetorics of care underlying them, and then highlight the way they may engage in controversial actions, thus rearranging one’s environment.

Our first example is Bradbury’s killing house from “The Veldt” short story (1950). Describing the life of the Hadley family within an automated house, the so-called Happylife Home. Progressively replacing the parents’ affection, the house’s nursery finally turns into a neurotological death trap for them. Our second example is Mother and the Motion Cookies. It is a set of sensors that can be attached to various objects and controlled through the mother hub by a selection of apps interpreting their data. It is marketed as a system allowing to “simply live your life”, and to understand how “your fitness, health, safety or domestic comfort” “[are] weav[ing] the fabric of your days and interact[ing] with each other” to “drop the pieces of your life’s puzzle into place.”

Both examples embody the metaphor of motherly care and answer to a will for emancipation from the daily tasks. It seems that artifacts may be misbehaving in three ways. By design, if they are designed to be fully-fledged agents with whom one has to compose—instead of being perfectly obedient. By allowing for misbehaving, by extending disobedient behaviours. And finally, by dysfunctioning by design, interrupting or derailing the task at hand.

Case study three: Towards a Rogue Architecture: the Practice of DIY-Spot Construction in the Skateboard Culture

In this case study, a specific use of urban environment (skateboarding, and especially the practice of DIY-spot building), is considered as a conceptive approach: if the theoretical starting points lie in concepts coined by (Foucault, 1982) and (De Certeau, 1990), this present case tries to exemplify some skateboarding practices as a non-formal conceptive approach.

If skateboarding validates the lefebvrian (2000 [1974]) definition of “architecture, not as a thing but as production of space, time and social being” (Borden 2003 [2001]: 1), the present case suggests to implement and amend this definition: skateboarding as architectural critique / skateboarding as architectural work.

From the historic spot of Burnside in Portland (Oregon) to micro-developments such as the Train Bank Spot in Malmö (Sweden), the past twenty-five years have seen a significant proliferation of amateur architectural interventions. Here, skateboarders turned into “rogue architects” implant new spaces designed for skateboarding, or work to unveil and realize the “skatable” potentialities of a site. In doing so they arrogate - without permission but with authority - a practice which regulation, supervision and legitimization is normally held exclusively by powers given the right to wield governmentality and administration (Howell, 2001): building architecture within the public space.

Conclusion and Discussion: Misbehaving in education.

Through those case-studies, we have highlighted how “misbehaving” could become a methodological framework to unveil, criticize and counter regulative and normative arrangements that are too often left unquestioned within a design project.

To test if, and how, this framework could be used during an actual design project, we proposed a workshop to a design school. It appears that our students struggled to use “misbehaving” during this workshop, but this experiment nonetheless provided us precious insights. Most of the students reported that they understood how “misbehaving” could be effective when it comes to define the scope of a personal project. But they underlined that it did not seem to be easily usable in a professional / industrial project for two reasons. First, because they already had developed a process for that case (as they indicated in the surveys). Second, because they assume that a client, commissioner or trade partner wouldn’t agree to see a design brief professionally processed and addressed following a mischievous process. However, they seem to understand how it could help them to face “wicked problems”, such as social design projects, but reported lacking of concrete tools to put “misbehaving” into application. Therefore, we believe that “misbehaving” could also be of great interest in design education to foster the “critical thinking” advocated in numerous curriculums. Hence, we will investigate further how to develop dedicated educational material.

Numerous questions remain, that nurture our ongoing research:

- What are the actual possibilities to set a framework for conceptive activities exclusively leaning on challenging and opposing frames?
- How could educators possibly teach design methods based on misbehaving?
- By extension, within contexts strongly informed by regulative and normative frames, such as education and work, what are the risks of deploying “misbehaving” as a method?
- Can we, and should we, designers and educators, deregulate any normative context?



Left: The Veldt, illustration
Right: Mother, visual advertizing

